



Post-conflict Peace-building in Sri Lanka: An analysis of Transformative approach

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ABSTRACT

Peace-building is a condition in which long-lasting peace is established and preventing violence by analyzing the root causes of the conflict. Many of the third-world countries are tasked with peace-building after the 1990s. Internal conflicts and civil wars are common in these countries and most of them are the result of ethnic conflicts. Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict which resulted in a three-year-long civil war ended in 2009. This article analyzes the peace-building process in Sri Lanka with the transformative theory of peace-building.

Keywords: Post-conflict, Peace-building, Mediation, Reconciliation, Transformative approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Peace can be defined a situation of stability and equilibrium. Peace building is a complex process with multi-actors involvement, which requires values, goals and commitment to protect certain basic human right. The basic elements involved in peace building are bringing security, political development, creating good economic and social environment. And it is essential for a post war peace building society. Peace building is a process starts after a long conflict situation. So the root of conflict should be identified in order to have sustainable peace. Conflict is a dynamic process and the extreme conflict is leading to civil War. Later after negotiation, mediation etc conflict resolution will be taking place. Only after conflict resolution the mechanics of peace building can be done. Peace building involves the attainment of some basic values like justice, trust, equality, right and freedom.

Johan Galtung a Norwegian sociologist first used the term peace building, in his work 'Three approaches to Peace: peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping'. Galtung identified both negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to absence of violence while positive peace includes positive aspects like the security of people, fulfilling the needs of individuals and so on. John Paul Lederach is having a different opinion regarding peace building. And he mentions that peace building involves the role of many actors which starts from the grass root level to international actors. Peace building is also having different dimensions like disarmament, demobilization, rebuilding the socio-political and economic aspects etc. Peace building can take place in a pre-conflict condition also, but most of the peace building mechanisms were given importance in a Post war situation.

1.1 Post-conflict Peace building

A post conflict society refers to a society which overcomes a situation of violence conflict. And this period of a country involves in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction, rebuilding etc in the field of social, economical, political and psychological relationships. It is not a condition were all the conflicts were ended, but officially one of the important violent conflict came to an end. Post war peace building helps to prevent the reemergence of violent conflicts. And help to rebuild the country to fight against any other conflicts. So therefore peace building in a post war society should give importance to certain basic elements like humanitarian assistance, human rights protection etc. The immediate post war condition of a society is horrible with its mass destruction of economy, environment, life and property of individuals. So the effects of conflict cannot be cleared suddenly. Post war peace building is not an easy mechanism, it will be a long process understanding the root causes for the war. There should be initiatives to

understand the ground level issues rather going for physical reconstruction. Maintaining equality is an important feature in building peace.

Now in the Peace building process the government and other organization should give importance to multicultural policies. While the post war peace building is aiming at sustainable peace, the multicultural aspects will help to fulfill it. In this present world peace building of a state is not only the responsibility of that country alone. Due to globalization, the whole world is dependent and any local issue can affect the whole world especially the economy. International organizations like United Nations, European Union, and African Union etc are important among them. Involvement of NGOs were active in conflict as well as in post conflict time and these efforts of International organization helps reducing conflict in Third World countries but this also has many drawbacks. International organizations and NGOs are also failing to rebuild the country with stable government, protecting human Rights, economic development, social equality and so on.

1.2 Peace building in Sri Lanka

After the three decades lasted Civil War, Sri Lanka is in the process of peace building. The war created much social, economic, psychological and political disorder in Sri Lanka. The country is now seeking many mechanisms to rebuild the whole situation. While analyzing the peace building mechanisms in Sri Lanka we see the involvement of three major parties, which is national level, regional level and international level. In the national level there is the Sri Lankan government with number of policies to rebuild Sri Lanka. The government is providing many humanitarian assistance, physical reconstruction and reconciliation. Regional level initiatives for Peace building are also important. Mainly the involvement of India, China and Pakistan were seen in Sri Lanka. And these countries are providing financial aids to Sri Lanka. Most of the regional supports were given during the Civil War like providing military assistance etc. International initiatives for peace building involve the role of United Nations, Nongovernmental Organization and some other developed countries. International initiatives also help in implementing the peace strategies of the government by providing financial supports.

The peace building context assessment report of 2016 says that from 2009 to 2014 there was no much improvement in the peace building mechanisms due to many internal and external factors. Only after 2014 there were initiatives for peace building in Sri Lanka. The 2015 election marks a political shift in peace building process of Sri Lanka. In order to have sustainable peace, a change in the political aspect of Sri Lanka is essential. So, the report mentions that changes should be done in the constitution level of the country. Constitution of Sri Lanka should be rewritten by giving importance to values such as equality, justice etc. The government reforms should be aimed at the well-being of all the individuals of that country. The government should be accountable to people. Local level governance and women participation can improve the peace building process in Sri Lanka.

1.3 Transformative approach to peace building

Transformative approach to peace building, this approach says that peace building should be transformational and should protect the identities, needs and interest of local actors. The local actors where given more priority and all the peace building or nation building efforts should done under the participation and consent of local actors. Sustainable peace can be brought under this approach. John Paul Lederach is one of the important pioneer in transformative approach to peace building. Lederach is an American professor, and his specialization is in international peace building and conflict transformation. All his major works were related to peace making process in conflict prone societies- Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures, The Journey toward Reconciliation and The Little Book of Conflict Transformation

Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, this work of Lederach analyze the implementation of sustainable peace in a conflict society by building peace and reconciliation. And in this book he questions the old diplomacy used to overcome conflicts and he opts for a multilevel initiative to tackle the crisis. He adopts new ideas and strategies for building sustainable peace in conflict societies. His entire focus is on reconciliation and only through this sustainable peace can be built. Importance of transformative approach is clearly mentioned in

this book. He identified a structure in the society for reconciliation that includes with three levels of leadership- Top, Middle and bottom level leaderships.

Peace building with the help of transformative approach use many ways like conflict transformation, transformative mediation, dialogue, collaborative learning, analytical problem solving, constructive confrontation and so on. In transformative mediation, there involves a mediator in order to solve the problem between two disputed parties. This helps to empower the parties and to have mutual settlements. Dialogue is an important term used in transformative approach, with the help of dialogue even deep rooted ethnic conflicts can be resolved. Dialogue helps to have conversation between the conflicting parties.

Transformative approach of peace building is an important contribution of Lederach. He is supporting for building long term infrastructure by helping the reconciliation prospective of society for peace building. This approach helps to find a third party or group for empowering to build peace. Based on the implementation of this theory into a conflict society, Lederach divided the society into three that is state level leadership, mid level leadership and grass root level leadership. State level initiative is an outcome oriented one. Mid level, here the leadership can made through more resolution oriented approach, here prominent personalities are needed to take initiatives by conducting workshops, peace commissions etc. The grass root level, represent the majority of the population. The local peace commissions etc will be working to build peace.

Important contributions of transformative approach to peace building are the shift from international actors to local actors. It focuses more on civil society and common people in the society. The foundation of Lederach's transformative theory of peace building can be found in Galtung's theory on violence and peace building. Lederach views peace building as a long term process of systematic transformation from war to peace. One of the important contributions of transformative theory while compared with reconstruction theory is that reconstruction is only the physical reconstruction of the society. But the transformative approach is reconstructing social relationship.

Transformative approach critics the realist and liberalist approach in Peace building as both approaches gives a negative picture of peace. Transformative approach looks peace building with a positive approach which is beyond the absence of war. Transformative peace building has many dimensions and it is a broader approach because it gives priority to many elements like individuals, their culture, social, economic, political and psychological condition. And this is a long term mechanism involving number of actors.

Lederach idea of transformative peace building divides the whole conflicting society into three that is Track I, consisting of the top leaders in the society. Track II, consisting of middle level leaders and Track III, consist of local and grass root level leadership. And the actors in these three tracks are involved in the peace building process of a post war society.

These three tracks of peace building are very much necessary in order to wipe out conflict and enmity from the society. Track three initiatives are presently very much active in Sri Lanka society. Through educational institutions the local actors try to interact with students to change the role of ethnicity in their political, social and economic being. The role of civil society is more in this respect. Mainly this kind of initiatives are very much seen in the northern part of Sri Lanka where the Tamils are more concentrated. Fear in Tamils is still continuing about the government and military. This insecurity feeling should be reduced, in order to have development in the society. Reconciliation process is essential in Sri Lankan society.

1.4 Track I: Political and Military Leadership in Sri Lanka

Track I in Paul Lederach's framework includes the top-level political and military leaders who play a crucial role in formal negotiations and decision-making processes. In the context of Sri Lanka, this track comprised key government figures and the LTTE's leadership during and immediately after the civil war. Following the war's end in 2009, the Sri Lankan government, led by figures like President Mahinda Rajapaksa, undertook significant military and political actions aimed at consolidating control and asserting national unity.

However, the post-war governance in Sri Lanka under Track I has been criticized for prioritizing a triumphalist narrative over genuine reconciliation. The government's focus on infrastructure development and economic growth, while important, often overshadowed the need for political solutions to address the grievances of the Tamil minority. The lack of a comprehensive political settlement that included devolution of power and recognition of Tamil identity issues has been a significant limitation. Moreover, the military's continued presence in the Northern and Eastern regions has been seen as an extension of wartime control rather than a peacebuilding measure, creating a sense of occupation among local communities.

1.5 Track II: Middle-Level Leadership in Sri Lanka

Track II includes middle-level actors such as academics, religious leaders, NGO representatives, and other influential figures who often serve as intermediaries between the top leadership and grassroots communities. In Sri Lanka, this track has been instrumental in facilitating dialogue and promoting reconciliation, particularly through interfaith initiatives and civil society engagement.

Religious leaders in Sri Lanka, for example, have played significant roles in fostering dialogue and understanding between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. The Congress of Religions, an interfaith body, has been active in promoting peace and reconciliation through public statements and community programs. Additionally, NGOs and civil society organizations have been involved in advocacy, human rights monitoring, and providing platforms for marginalized voices.

Despite these efforts, Track II actors often face challenges such as limited political influence and funding constraints. Moreover, the politicization of civil society and media restrictions can hamper the effectiveness of these middle-level actors. There is also the issue of representation, as not all voices within the Tamil or Sinhalese communities are adequately represented, leading to a potential disconnect between the leaders and the broader population.

1.6 Track III: Grassroots and Local Leadership in Sri Lanka

Track III involves grassroots leaders and local actors, including community leaders, local NGOs, and ordinary citizens, who are crucial for implementing peacebuilding at the local level. In Sri Lanka, grassroots efforts have been essential for addressing everyday needs and fostering social cohesion in post-conflict communities.

Local initiatives in the Northern and Eastern provinces have focused on rebuilding trust and promoting coexistence among diverse ethnic groups. Community-based organizations have played roles in post-war reconstruction, such as rebuilding homes and infrastructure, providing livelihood support, and offering psychosocial services to war-affected populations. These efforts are critical in addressing the immediate needs of communities and helping them recover from the trauma of war.

However, the effectiveness of Track III actors can be constrained by a lack of resources, political interference, and a need for more support from higher-level actors. Additionally, ongoing issues such as land disputes, economic disparities, and the militarization of certain regions continue to pose significant challenges to grassroots peacebuilding. The legacy of war has also left deep-seated mistrust and fear, which grassroots leaders must work to overcome.

2. INTERPLAY AND CHALLENGES AMONG THE TRACKS

Lederach's framework emphasizes the importance of interplay among the three tracks to ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach to peacebuilding. In Sri Lanka, the coordination between Track I, II, and III actors has been inconsistent, with significant gaps in communication and cooperation. The top-down approach often taken by the government (Track I) has not always aligned with the grassroots needs and perspectives articulated by Track III actors, nor has it fully incorporated the mediation and advocacy roles of Track II.

This disconnect can lead to the marginalization of key issues, such as the need for political reform and the recognition of minority rights, which are critical for long-term peace. Furthermore, the centralization of power and lack of inclusive dialogue processes can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and alienation among minority communities, undermining reconciliation efforts.

3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVED PEACEBUILDING

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for enhancing peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka by strengthening the roles and coordination of actors across all three tracks. For Track I, this involves a more inclusive approach to governance, where political solutions address the root causes of conflict, including ethnic grievances and the need for power-sharing arrangements. There is also a need for demilitarization and promoting human rights to build trust among all communities.

For Track II, expanding the capacity and influence of civil society and religious leaders can help bridge the gap between top-level policies and grassroots realities. This includes providing platforms for diverse voices, fostering intercommunal dialogue, and advocating for policy changes that reflect the needs of marginalized groups.

Track III actors should continue to be empowered to lead local peacebuilding initiatives, supported by adequate resources and recognition from higher levels of governance. Encouraging community participation in decision-making processes and promoting local ownership of peacebuilding initiatives are essential steps toward sustainable peace.

4. CONCLUSION

Peace building is an essential element after and before a Civil War. And the post war peace building is more important for a developing country. And now Sri Lanka is in the process of peace building. While peace building is analyzed with human security, the post war peace building process in Sri Lanka is having many defects. The social and political inequality, poverty and many other issues are still continuing. The peace building should start from the bottom of the society. The actual problem should be taken into consideration. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is the cause for the Civil War and therefore the peace building should aim at solving ethnic conflicts. There were many initiatives to overcome this conflict. But the local level transformative peace building is more effective in Sri Lankan society.

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